

**BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE ADVISORY PANEL
MEETING MINUTES**

Date: May 3, 2018

Meeting #2

Project: Somerset Apartments

Phase: Design Development

Beatty Dev./ Commercial Dev./ The Henson Dev. Co./ Mission First Housing

Location: 1234 McElderry Street between Aisquith Street, and N Central Ave, Baltimore MD

PRESENTATION:

Ms. Dana Henson of the Henson Development Company provided the project background and presented the site and its context. Mr. Mel Thompson of Grimm + Parker Architects presented updates to the project in response to previous panel comments. Site and storm water management updates were presented by STV.

The project, now known as 1234 Mc Elderry, is a 4-story mixed-use residential development with 104 residential units and some ground floor retail. It is the first of four buildings planned for a multi-phased development. The presenters referenced a master plan that includes developing the blocks immediately east of the Old Town Mall and bounded to the west by North Aisquith Street, to the east by North Central Avenue and to the south by East Orleans Street. The plan intends to restore Mc Elderry Street as a connection between Johns Hopkins' main building to the downtown area.

Changes since the last presentation include:

- Removal of the lower parking level by reduction in the number of parking spaces, and providing access only from North Central Avenue.
- Rework of the service and loading access area off North Aisquith Street to provide screened surface parking.
- Creation of an open and continuous yard along the north and west perimeter of the first floor to create a fenced storm water management area contiguous with the north lot line.
- Shortening the most westerly leg of the building along Mc Elderry by rework of the program. Addition of ground floor residential on Mc Elderry between Somerset Street and North Aisquith Street; and limiting retail to the corner of Mc Elderry and North Central Streets.
- Addition of an open green area to serve as a buffer for the surface parking and complete the corner between the west wall of the shortened building along Mc Elderry and Aisquith Street.
- Realignment of the building entry portico to be centered on North Central Park.
- Addition of low lying planting along ground floor between building recesses and sidewalk
- Refinement of building facades by organizing elements in a balanced manner to provide more legible facade and simplifying cornice
- The use of a simplified palette of materials

Comments from the Panel:

Site:

The panel expressed some concern with the minimal landscape treatment and site development of the open yard along the north facing side of the project, but was receptive to the clustering of trees opposite windows to screen the adjacent parking lot. The design team clarified that no circulation can occur within the designated storm water area so it will function more as a passive space, except for a paved egress path running contiguous with the building. The panel suggested opening up the garage to the green space and using the lot line fence to provide screening and frame the yard.

The panel suggested improvements on the ground plain along Mc Elderry to better activate the street and relate to North Central Park. While use of low lying perennials and grasses provide some relief from the sidewalk along the first floor apartments, the panel felt the design team should explore a deeper row of plantings in front of residential windows. Providing a design plan for the green area between the surface parking and the sidewalk on Mc Elderry, and adding seating will improve the transition from the corner at Aisquith to the residential character planned for the sidewalk segment adjacent to the apartments.

Site elements should be incorporated to improve pedestrian safety. The sidewalk on the north side of Mc Elderry at the intersection of Somerset Street should be widened to reduce the crosswalk and create a pedestrian friendly crossing similar to crosswalks at North Central and North Aisquith.

While the design team mentioned using a part of the north wall off North Central Ave as an art wall, no details were provided. A more detailed landscape design for the buildings immediate site is needed.

Building:

The panel welcomed the improvements made to the building massing and contemporary detailing. Centering the entry portico on the village green is a good urban gesture that ties the building spatially to the village green, North Central Park which is viewed as a convenient and important community open space. Shortening the building along Mc Elderry and reorganizing the grouping of fenestration elements using continuous folded plane details, present the massing in a manner fitting the scale of the four-story residential structure. A simplified palette of materials that include brick and accent panels applied around all facades show the building in a coherent manner that is satisfying. At the corner of Mc Elderry and North Central, use of a folded plane to hold the three-story block made up of larger windows that contrast with other similar blocks comprised of regular sized windows, defines and turns the corner in an appropriate manner. The Panel suggested that the team consider the roof line definition at the projecting bays and simplify the expression.

At the first floor corner retail, the panel suggested removing the low planting and moving the glazed wall out to announce the retail or consider adding seating to better activate the corner. Adding pockets of seating along the communal area was also suggested as a further design improvement.

While the panel was complimentary of the façade treatment above the ground floor along Mc Elderry, further improvement was needed at the first floor. The panel recommended further study of the residential entry door placement noting that it isn't easily obvious, even though the main entry portico is visible and distinguishable being located prominently off the end of North Central Park. Use of the lighter masonry from the 'entrance gesture' along the base of the retail was suggested as a way of further accentuating the main corner. The panel recommended that the design team revisit the first floor fenestration along Mc

Elderry. Smaller windows to articulate a residential scale was suggested for the residential uses. At the communal area, entry portico and retail, use of similar materials, window sizes and styles was suggested to express the communal character and contrast them from the private residential apartments to the west. It is believed this gesture can further improve the legibility of the façade and balance the mass fronting on the park; as well as visually connect the communal spaces within the development with the community open space provided by the park.

The panel expressed that more retail would be desirable. The design and development team clarified that the logistics of this phase limited the amount of retail, but offered that more retail is planned in future phases to serve the expanding community.

The panel reminded the designers of planned improvements along Central Avenue to improve its prominence as a key circulation artery, so attention should be given to facilitating convenient and safe access to and from the project's parking garage.

Next Steps:

This meeting completes the Schematic Level review and the project moves on to Design Development Review.

Attending:

Mel Thompson, Ryan Geiger – Grimm + Parker Architects
Dana Henson, David Henson – Henson Development Co.
Susan Williams, Kristen Gedeon– STV
Christopher Everett – Mission First
Steve Tsamouras, Alex Tsamouras, Stanley Zendew – Oldtown Mall Investors
Brian Greenan, Lembit Yogi - HABC

Messrs. Anthony*, Ostovar, Mses. Walker, O'Neill, and Ilieva - UDAAP Panel

Anthony Cataldo, Christina Hartsfield, Director Tom Stosur, Martin French, Marshella Wallace, Matthew DeSantis - Planning